

North Central Valley
JACL/CSUS Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

Ida Sayoko Nishiguchi Otani

March 12, 1998
Rocklin, California

By Joanne Iritani
for
Placer County JACL

Consortium of JACL Chapters
Florin-French Camp-Lodi-Placer-Stockton
California State University, Sacramento
Special Collections/University Archives
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Florin - French Camp - Lodi - Placer - Stockton*

*California State University, Sacramento
Special Collections / University Archives*

MISSION STATEMENT

To collect and preserve the historical record of the multigenerational experience of Japanese Americans and others who befriended them in the communities of the JACL Chapters of this Consortium. The books produced will enhance the CSUS/Japanese American Archival Collection housed in the California State University, Sacramento Archives for study, research, teaching and exhibition. This unique Collection of life histories provides a permanent resource for the use of American and international scholars, researchers and faculty, as well as a lesson for future generations to appreciate the process of protecting and preserving the United States Constitution and America's democratic principles.

PREFACE

This JACL/CSUS Oral History Project provides completed books and tapes of Oral Histories presented to the interviewed subjects, to the California State University, Sacramento/Japanese American Archival Collection, and to the local JACL Chapters. Copyright is held by the Consortium of JACL Chapters and California State University, Sacramento. Photocopying is limited to a maximum of 20 pages per volume. Photographic rights of the primary portrait of interviewees are held by Gail Matsui Photography.

This project will continue the mission of the Florin JACL which recognized the necessity of interviewing Japanese Americans: "We have conducted these interviews with feelings of urgency. If we are to come away with lessons from this historic tragedy, we must listen to and become acquainted with the people who were there. Many of these historians are in their seventies, eighties and nineties. We are grateful that they were willing to share their experiences and to answer our questions with openness and thoughtfulness." This same urgency to conduct interviews is felt by the other North Central Valley (Sacramento/San Joaquin Valley) JACL Chapters. There are still many stories that must be told.

The Oral Histories in the Japanese American Archival Collection relate the personal stories of the events surrounding the exclusion, forced removal and internment of civilians and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry. There is a wide variety of interviews of former internees, military personnel, people who befriended the Japanese Americans, Caucasians who worked in the internment camps and others, whose stories will serve to inform the public of the fundamental injustice of the government's action in the detention of the Japanese aliens and "non-aliens", so that the causes and circumstances of this and similar events may be illuminated and understood.

The population of those who lived through the World War II years is rapidly diminishing, and in a few years, will altogether vanish. Their stories must be preserved for the historians and researchers today and in the future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERVIEW HISTORY	i
BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY	ii
PHOTOS AND DOCUMENTS	
SESSION 1, March 12 1998	
[Tape 1, Side A]	1
Birth in Wattis, Utah--Parents-- Schools--Father's work--Siblings--Gerlach Nevada--Westminster College--Father fired from railroad February, 1942-- Two brothers drafted before World War II--Parents banished from the town to a trailer in the desert--Brother Roy on furlough from Army visited parents-- Family moved to Reno--Reno Business College--Hired by Graham Dean-- Siblings' activities--	
[Tape 1, Side B]	22
Japanese community in Reno--Marriage to Robert Otani in 1951--Children Robert and Maureen--Work for Aerojet General and Sierra College--Father's unhappy childhood--Mother's family--Marriage of parents--Father obtains U.S. citizenship--Parents' musical activities--Bob and Ida visited Japan-- Church activities--JACL member--Mastectomy--	

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER

Joanne Iritani is a Florin JACL member, President in 1996-97, Education Chair, and retired special education teacher with a master's degree from California State University, Bakersfield.

INTERVIEW TIME AND PLACE

March 12, 1998
The home of Ida and Bob Otani
5385 Sierra College Boulevard
Rocklin, California

TRANSCRIBING AND EDITING

Transcribing and word processing by Joanne Iritani
Editing by Ida Otani.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The primary photograph was taken by Gail Matsui, JACL member, French Camp chapter.

TAPES AND INTERVIEW RECORDS

Copies of the bound transcript and the tapes will be kept by the Placer County Japanese American Citizens League and in the University Archives at the Library, California State University, Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, California 95819.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Ida Sayoko Nishiguchi Otani was born on June 24, 1922 in Wattis, Utah to Sam Masaiichi Nishiguchi and Yaeno Kawaguchi Nishiguchi. Her parents were immigrants from Wakayama Prefecture, Japan. There were nine children born in various places of Utah. One child died in infancy.

Ida attended grammar school in Salt Lake City and during her middle and high school years, her father worked for the railroad company in Gerlach, Nevada. The years in Gerlach, where they were the only Japanese American family, were happy with the feeling of acceptance by the community.

Ida's two brothers had been drafted by the U.S. military before World War II began in December, 1941. Ida attended Westminster College in Salt Lake City from September, 1940 until June, 1942 when she returned to Gerlach and then moved to Reno with the family.

In February, 1942, Ida's father was fired from the railroad at the behest of the U.S. government. The family was forced to vacate their company owned housing and Ida's father, mother, and six year old sister were forced to stay in a small two-wheeled trailer in the middle of the desert, and were warned not to return to Gerlach. The trailer held only a double bed, and the older sisters, who were allowed to stay in town, brought food and water to their parents. The parents and little sister lived under this stressful condition from February until June, 1942. In June, their daughter Bessie graduated from Gerlach High School with the condition that an armed constable must escort her to the graduation. The situations of forced living in a trailer and having an armed constable escort had been determined by local authorities.

Although Ida felt that their childhood in Gerlach had been happy, and that the family had community acceptance, with the onset of the war, very few people came to the aid of their family because of their Japanese ancestry.

After Bessie's graduation, the family moved to Reno where Ida attended Reno Business College and subsequently was hired as a private secretary by Mr. Graham Dean, publisher of two Reno newspapers. Ida spoke glowingly of Mr. Dean's courage in hiring a person of Japanese ancestry.

In Reno, Ida's father worked for a Japanese vegetable farmer, and for the first time in his work career in the United States, he was not in a supervisory position. After the McCarran-Walter Act permitted Japanese to obtain U.S. citizenship in 1952, Ida's father was the first Issei in Nevada to do so. He was a self-taught scholar who obtained his citizenship without benefit of a class.

Ida married Robert Otani in 1951 and lived on the family farm in Rocklin where they presently reside, sans orchard. They are parents of two children, Kelley and Maureen and have two grandsons. After working for Aerojet General Corp. and Sierra College, Ida is retired and participating in activities of the First United Methodist Church of Loomis.

In March, 1998, the Office of Redress Administration made families of miners and railroad workers eligible for an official apology and monetary redress of \$20,000 each under the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

[Session 1, March 12, 1998]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

IRITANI: [I am Joanne] Iritani with the North Central Valley JACL/CSUS Oral History Project, and we are recording this for the Placer County JACL [Japanese American Citizens League]. I am interviewing Ida Otani at her home on Sierra College Boulevard, 5385 Sierra College Boulevard, Rocklin, California.

Ida, will you begin by giving us your background and you can tell us about your family?

OTANI: I was born in Wattis, Utah which is a coal mining town. My father [Sam Masaiichi Nishiguchi] was a coal miner. His occupation was as a motorman. And my mother [Yaeno Kawaguchi Nishiguchi] did the cooking in the boarding house for the single workers. My father and older sister Mary visited the area, approximately forty years ago and the day they arrived in Wattis the post office was being closed.

When I was about five years old, my father and mother decided to venture out into the business of running a noodle parlor in Ogden, Utah. It turned out to be quite a failure. After one year they moved their family to Salt Lake City, and that's

where my memories begin. I was six years old and I attended Fremont School in Salt Lake City, first through third grades.

IRITANI: You had your grade school as well as high school in Salt Lake City?

OTANI: I attended grade school [in Salt Lake City, grades first through third at Fremont School and grades fourth, fifth and sixth at Lafayette School. I attended Gerlach Grammar School for seventh and eighth grades and graduated from Gerlach High School.]*

[Telephone interruption]

OTANI: It was during the depression, when our family moved to Salt Lake City, and my father got a job with the Western Pacific Railroad as a switchman. Then he was promoted to section foreman, and then from there he was promoted again as the foreman of an extra gang. He supervised about thirty six men. The extra gang crew lived in box cars which were converted into living quarters. [My father was quartered in one private car, next to the cook's quarters and dining car. Extra gangs were assigned to maintaining the railroad by divisions, which comprised of several sections, and were constantly on the move.]* The only time we saw our father was when he came home on holidays, or when we children would go out to visit him during the summer months. We were separated from him for about five years, until my mother and dad decided that that would not do for our family life. So my father

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

put in a bid for Gerlach, Nevada, which was one of the sections on the railroad that had a high school as well as grammar school.

[Gerlach is 100 miles north of Reno, Nevada, and is north of Pyramid Lake.]

IRITANI: And by then, all the children were born. How many were there? How many siblings?

OTANI: There were eight of us, two boys and six girls, including myself.

IRITANI: And everyone was born in Salt Lake City?

OTANI; No, all my siblings were born in different parts of Utah. Provo, Hiawatha, and Salt Lake City. My older brother and older sister graduated from West High School in Salt Lake City.

IRITANI: You want to give us everyone's names?

OTANI: Oh yes, okay. The oldest one in my family was my sister Mary. My brother was next, his name is Roy. [My second brother Ray died at six months of age from spinal meningitis.] And then Art was next, and I was below Art, I am three years younger than Art. Then next was my sister Bessie, who was two years younger than I. Then there was Grace who was two years younger than Bessie, and then Joy. . .

IRITANI: Anyway your mother had her hands full [laughter].

OTANI: Yeah. [laughter] Joy was four years younger than Bessie. Then along came Mimi, seven years later, during my mother's change-of-life [menopause]. [My mother almost died when Mimi was born. Fortunately, she had gone to Salt Lake City for her delivery.

OTANI: Her doctor had not held out much hope that she would survive. He actually plied on her spirit to fight because of her young children.]* Her name was Elaine, but we call her Mimi. So we lived in this little railroad town called Gerlach, population of not more than two hundred at the most. There was a big hotel that catered to the railroad workers who stayed overnight when making crew changeovers. And there was a restaurant that catered to the same railroad engineers and firemen and switchmen. [There were six or seven saloons, a post office, and grocery store and service station.] I would say we had a very happy life in Gerlach. It was the first time the family had been together in five years, and the town was so small that when we had any activities in high school the whole community participated. I especially remember playing volleyball a lot, teaming up with the adults who lived in town along with the high school students. One of the members of the school board [instigated conversion of our beautiful, new gymnasium to a roller rink, which really must have played havoc on the floor even with our rubber wheels. This was a one-season deal--never to be repeated. Of course the floors had to be refinished and repaired. But everyone in the community]* learned to roller skate. And then there was a swimming hole about a mile away--[a natural hot springs that everybody frequented.] So we had a pretty

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

happy life. We were accepted by the Caucasians in the town. We were in and out of each others' homes, staying overnight, sometimes. And we considered them very good friends. But all that changed when the day came when my father was fired from his [job with the railroad and became the enemy overnight.]

IRITANI: Well, before your father was fired, on December 7th [1941], or times right after that, were there any signs of the recognition that you people were of Japanese heritage? You know, like one man said that the next day [December 8] on Monday when he went to school, nobody would look at him. Were there that kind of reactions from your friends?

OTANI: Well, I really don't know [first hand] about what my family faced in Gerlach, because I was attending school in. . .

IRITANI: Oh you were already. . .

OTANI: Salt Lake City. Westminster College in Salt Lake City. But my youngest sister, Mimi, did tell me that she had all kinds of mean things done to her by the other kids.

IRITANI: And she was still. . .

OTANI: She was six years old.

IRITANI: Six years old. Oh my.

OTANI: I don't remember my other sisters telling me anything, but I'm sure there must have been incidents.

IRITANI: There was reaction.

OTANI; Yes, there was discrimination.

IRITANI: And when you went to college, you went right out of high school?

Graduated high school.

OTANI: No, not really. [laughter] After I graduated from high school. . .

IRITANI: Which was in what year?

OTANI: 1940.

IRITANI: Oh, you graduated in '40.

OTANI: Anyway, I enrolled at the University of Nevada on my own. I got all settled in. I had a place to stay, was all registered and ready to start my classes. But I got called home by my mother and dad. I think it was because they wanted me to go someplace where I would be in contact with more Japanese. [I took post graduate classes at Gerlach High School and in September], my mother made all the arrangements [for me to attend school in Salt Lake City] where she had friends having lived there previously. She arranged for me to stay in a friend's home, and went with me to register at Westminster College. [laughter] I'm sure that's what she had in mind. She wanted me to [make Japanese friends].

IRITANI: Westminster is in the town of. . .

OTANI: Salt Lake City.

IRITANI: In Salt Lake City.

OTANI: Right in Salt Lake City.

IRITANI: Is it a . . . it's a private . . .

OTANI: Yes, a private institution.

IRITANI: Presbyterian?

OTANI: Presbyterian. Right. Went to Bible study class everyday, chapel everyday. [My goal was to go into nursing. After I completed my first semester at Westminster, I applied to several nursing schools in Salt Lake City. I remember going in person to the L.D.S. [Mormon] hospital, St. Mary's , Wasatch, and Holy Cross hospitals. None of them would accept me. I was told that being Japanese the patients that I would be coming in contact with during my training would react negatively to me. I later received a letter from Mrs. Christie Thompson, Director of Public Health Nursing for the Nevada State Department of Health in which she said, "We have heard from the L.D.S. Hospital, and they say they are keeping your application on file. They feel that you should be well qualified, and as soon as the National League of Educational Nursing completes plans for making it possible for students of Japanese descent to enter training schools, they will notify you." I never heard from them.]*

I remember being very uncomfortable on December 7. Even though no one said anything outright, I could feel the stares.

IRITANI: The difference.

OTANI: Yes, I could feel the atmosphere was different. But the teachers were wonderful to me. Wonderful. In December, of that year, I went to the railroad station to make arrangements to go home for Christmas vacation. My home was five hundred miles away, and

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

I had to ride the trains to get there. I was told that I wouldn't be allowed to ride the trains because of my. . .

IRITANI: Because you are of Japanese heritage.

OTANI: The President of the College, I remember his name to this day-- Dr. Robert Steele interceded for me and so I was able. . .

IRITANI: And how do you spell Dr. Steele?

OTANI: S-T-E-E-L-E. And what was so heartwarming was that my sociology teacher came to me immediately when he heard that I was turned away by the railroads. He said that he and his wife were ready to drive me all the way home--500 miles!

IRITANI: Oh, my!

OTANI: As it turned out, it wasn't necessary. So there were good people in this world. And I'll always remember them. But. . .

IRITANI: And then you were able to come home, and what did you find?

OTANI: My father wasn't fired by the railroad, working closely with the U.S. government, until February 1942.

IRITANI: Oh, I see.

OTANI: So previous to that time, I came home for Christmas. I had a wonderful time and went back to school. When I was notified that my father was fired and evicted from our home, I offered to come home. But my parents wouldn't hear of it. They wanted me to finish out the semester. So that's what I did.

IRITANI: How was he. . . do you know how your father was informed? Was it by letter, by the railroad company or. . .

OTANI: As far as I can gather, one of the agents came to him and just directly told him. Told him that he had twenty four hours to clear out of the railroad premises and our home.

IRITANI: Out of the house.

OTANI: Remember I told you how friendly the town was? They accepted us. We thought we were among friends.

IRITANI: Just one of the. . .

OTANI: My brother and I were recently trying to remember who the people were that came to my father's aid and we couldn't think of more than three or four. Everybody else turned against the family.

IRITANI: In what way? Could you. . .

OTANI: Well, the hotel owner, for example. Her name was Mrs. Boyd. My older sister happened to be visiting the family at the time. She was pregnant and feeling ill.

IRITANI: Your sister was?

OTANI: Yes. Mrs. Boyd was a registered nurse. My sister Mary sent my sister Bessie down to get Mrs. Boyd to come up and help her. Mrs. Boyd told her, "I can't help you because my country is at war with your country."

IRITANI: Oh, my!

OTANI: Isn't that gross? And so as I was saying, there were less than a handful of people that came to my mother and dad's aid.

[The sister who had the fullest knowledge of what took place

during my father's firing and eviction died seven years ago. She was Bessie, two years younger than I, who was able to attend her high school graduation exercises only with the escort of a gun-toting constable.]*

IRITANI: Oh my gosh!

OTANI: He carried a gun, she said.

IRITANI: And this was not in the war zone? It's not in the military zone.

OTANI: No, no. It wasn't declared a military zone --just railroad property.

IRITANI: Because Nevada was not in the military zone.

OTANI: So when we talk about this now, we feel that these people just did this on their own. Like the constable, for example. So anyway, she was the one that would remember the most vividly what had happened at the time.

IRITANI: The others, you and your older siblings had already moved out from the home?

OTANI: Well, my older sister, was married and lived in Tennessee and my two brothers were in the military service.

IRITANI: Oh, they were. Were they drafted?

OTANI: They were drafted.

IRITANI: Both of them.

OTANI: Before. . .

IRITANI: Before the war started.

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

OTANI: Before the war. So the oldest one home was Bessie, the one who just graduated from high school.

IRITANI: And a constable had to escort her to the graduation. Oh, my.

OTANI: And they had to abide by a curfew. As I said before, my older sister Mary from Lewisburg, Tennessee, happened to be home visiting the family and so she made arrangements to rent a little house and looked after Bessie and Grace and Joy, my younger sisters. And my youngest sister Mimi, who was six years old at the time, and my parents were banished from the town. They had to get off of railroad property. Someone, we don't know who, made the arrangements. They got a little two-wheeled trailer, just big enough to hold a double bed, and put it out in the middle of the desert. My parents weren't allowed to come near town. Food, water . . .

IRITANI: Had to be taken to them?

OTANI: Had to be taken out to them. They were forbidden to come near the town, to step onto railroad property--a radius of two miles, I was told.

IRITANI: Oh, my goodness! Gee, this is the first time I heard anything like this! Oh, my! But the other children remained in town?

OTANI: My sisters were given permission to stay in town until the school year ended [June, 1942].

IRITANI: Just the school year. And then where did they go?

- OTANI: I think my sisters continued to live in this little shack, and my mother and dad were moved further out in the country. My oldest brother Roy got permission to come out to visit them. He was so angry. It was in the middle of winter, February. He had to walk through mud and mire to get to the trailer. He said he knocked on the door of the trailer, and my parents were so afraid they would not respond until he called out to them.
- IRITANI: They didn't know who. . .
- OTANI: They didn't know who was there. And my brother said that shortly after they greeted each other tearfully, all of a sudden there was a big knock at the door. My brother said it was an agent. The agent told him, "I'm keeping my eyes on you," or something to that effect. He said, "I'm making sure that your parents don't leave this trailer." My brother was horrified at their situation. He says that when he thinks about it today, he wonders, how they managed to go to the bathroom? He said there was nothing. . .
- IRITANI: Nothing but the bed in that little trailer?
- OTANI: You're right. And it was in middle of a desert. Not even a bush. It was just flat desert.
- IRITANI: Flat desert. Were they able to cook? In that trailer?
- OTANI: Oh, that's interesting. I don't think so. I think everything was taken out to them.
- IRITANI: All the food had to be taken to them everyday?
- OTANI: Yes, and water.

IRITANI: Oh, my goodness! So how long did they live in that condition?

OTANI: From February to June [1942]. Until school was out at least. It may have been longer. It's not clear to me. But my sister had a friend in Reno. And she made arrangements. . .

IRITANI: That's your older sister Mary.

OTANI: Her friend's name was Mary Date. She lives in Reno right now. Mary and her husband found a little house--my parents called it the "pigeon house." It was an upstairs apartment. and it was so tiny. So then my parents came to Reno. Let's see, there was Bessie, Joy, Grace and Mimi, my four younger sisters, who, along with my parents, lived in that pigeon house under very poor conditions. Terrible conditions. But it was the best they could get in the hostile environment. Fortunately, our friend Mary had a Japanese friend who had a vegetable farm. So my father went to work for him, cutting and binding onions and doing menial work like that.

IRITANI: But, there must have been many other Issei [immigrants from Japan] in that town? Not in Gerlach, but in Reno?

OTANI: Yes, there were. They had their problems, too. I think one of them, Mr. Fujii, I heard later, was threatened by the FBI. Whether or not that was a fact, he nevertheless had to go to jail. . . because he was defiant, I was told. And like Fumi Shimada tells it [Fumi Shimada's father was also fired by the railroad company.] You know, it's all vague to me, because I was not right there.

IRITANI: You were not right there, but still the fact that they were treated in that way, just surprises me.

OTANI: Oh, and I forgot to mention that when my brother got special permission to take a furlough to see the folks, he got as far as Reno [by bus, had to stay overnight in Reno, and had to catch another bus from Reno to Portola to catch a train to Gerlach. Gerlach is not serviced by buses.]* But he was refused lodging in Reno.

IRITANI: Lodging. Right. Here he is in uniform

OTANI: He was in uniform, and he said he was so angry he didn't know what to do. So he got a cab and the money that he was planning to give to my parents was used to hire a taxi to drive him fifty miles to the next railroad station so he could catch the train from there to Gerlach.

IRITANI: Oh. Where was he stationed?

OTANI: He was stationed in [at Fort Ord, Monterey, at that time. Subsequently, he was transferred to various camps in Texas.]* Then he was chosen to go to Camp Savage.

IRITANI: Oh, the MIS [Military Intelligence Language School to teach the Japanese language to help the U.S. military in the Pacific theater of War].

OTANI: [He completed the course, but wasn't able to continue with his group because he developed medical problems, an infected lymph

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

gland in his neck. He said he lucked out because his sergeant and his twelve interpreters and translators perished in a plane crash over Okinawa. Over his objections, Roy was medically discharged from service because the doctors weren't able to treat his condition. He has never had further problems with it.]* He considers himself fortunate.

IRITANI: Fortunate he had medical problems. And so he was stationed at Savage when he came over here to be with your. . .

OTANI: No.

IRITANI: Or was he still in basic training or something?

OTANI: He was stationed at Fort Ord when my father was fired.

IRITANI: And you had another brother in the service?

OTANI: He was already overseas.

IRITANI: Oh, he was?

OTANI: He took part in the Normandy invasion. He's lucky to be here today. There was nothing he could do for my parents.

IRITANI: He was not in the 442 then. [442 Regimental Combat Team made up of men of Japanese ancestry who fought in Italy and France.]

OTANI: No.

IRITANI: What was he in? The Nevada Regiment or something?

OTANI: No. You know what? This sounds crazy, but, you know Nishiguchi does sound like a Polish name, so maybe that's why he ended up with a Polish group. [He was stationed at Camp

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

Grant from where some of our Japanese friends were assigned to the 442nd.]

IRITANI: Polish group. I'll be. . .

OTANI: Bob Otani [husband of Ida] must have been taken as an Irish name. He was put in an all-Irish outfit. [Bob said he started out with the 442 several times but always got left behind until he was finally transferred into the Irish outfit.]

IRITANI: Okay, Nishiguchi was Polish. [laughter]

OTANI: Yeah. Otani's Irish. [laughter] So, otherwise they would have been with the 442, I'm sure, you know, being *Nihonjin* [Japanese].

IRITANI: So your brother was able to come home just to visit his family.

OTANI: Just briefly. Very briefly.

IRITANI: And then had to go back to camp, of course.

OTANI: There was nothing he could do for them. Nothing.

IRITANI: Of course.

OTANI: His emergency furlough was for three days.

IRITANI: Right. And not everybody was given those furloughs either.

OTANI: No. This was very unusual. He said he had a very understanding Commanding Officer.

IRITANI: That was good. To get back to where you were. You were at Westminster College through the whole war then? Or you finished up there?

OTANI: It was December of what? '40? . . .

IRITANI: '41. The war started.

OTANI: Pearl Harbor. I finished the semester in June [of '42] and came back to Gerlach. By that time the family was gone, but my older sister was still living there. So for a few months I stayed with her. Mrs. McGinnis who owned the restaurant gave me a job waiting on tables. So I did that until the fall when I went to Reno and joined the family.

And then I had to hurry up and do something to make myself employable. So I worked my way through business college.

IRITANI: Oh, after you got here [to Reno]?

OTANI: I did housework for a short while until the school term started. Then I enrolled in Reno Business College, and worked my way through. It took me nine months to get my executive secretary diploma.

I've got to tell you about the man who hired me after I graduated. It makes me want to cry when I think about him. The president of the college told me that Mr. Graham Dean, who was the publisher of the. . .

IRITANI: How do you spell it? G-R-A-H-A-M.

OTANI: Dean. D-E-A-N. He was the publisher of the Reno Newspapers, Inc. He must have been a very liberal minded man, a humanitarian. He'd never had a secretary before. Mr. Linnecke, who was the president of the college, told me after I was hired by Mr. Dean, that he had had a difficult time finding a placement for

me. Because everybody was, you know, not willing to hire a Japanese.

IRITANI: And the president of your college, his name was.?

OTANI: Linnecke. L-I-N-N-E-C-K-E. I can't remember his first name.

IRITANI: It's okay. That's the President of the Westminster?

OTANI: No, the President of the Reno Business College.

IRITANI: Reno Business College.

OTANI: So Mr. Dean hired me as his private secretary. Whenever somebody stopped in the office who he thought was making unkind or rude remarks, he'd jump up from his desk stand in the doorway. [laughter] He was very protective.

IRITANI: Oh, my.

OTANI: I worked for him for seven years. Until I got married.

IRITANI: Oh, you did.

OTANI: It was courageous of him to hire me because in those days, you know. . .

IRITANI: Very unpopular.

OTANI: Yes. Very unpopular.

IRITANI: And you were in a position since it was. . . what newspaper was that?

OTANI: Reno Newspapers, Incorporated was the name of the company. *The Reno Evening Gazette* and the *Nevada State Journal*, were daily papers with differing political inclinations, but were both owned by the same company.

IRITANI: The fact that you were a secretary, you were in a very visible position.

OTANI: Right.

IRITANI: And he was that protective. Wonderful!

OTANI: Very protective.

IRITANI: And as far as the work itself goes, it's what you learned to do.

OTANI: Right.

IRITANI: So that was nothing taxing about the work that you did.

OTANI: No, no, I just did routine secretarial work. But when I think about him today, I feel so grateful to him for giving me a job, because it was, I think, very courageous on his part during those times.

IRITANI: That's right, that's right. That's exactly the thing that I'm trying to stress to people nowadays.

OTANI: Mr. Linnecke, the President of Reno Business College made it a point to tell me after I was hired, that it was very difficult to place me and he also was grateful to Mr. Dean.

IRITANI: How about the rest of your family here? How did they fare in school? The younger ones were still in school.

OTANI: Bessie, the one who graduated from Gerlach High School, did pretty much what I did. She did housework for a while until the school term started and she, too, went to business college. The same business school I went to. Then she went to work for the Community Chest.

IRITANI: And she was able to get a job, too.

OTANI: Right.

IRITANI: How about the . . . and then the younger sisters were in school?

OTANI: My fourth youngest sister Joy graduated from Reno High School and then went to beauty college. The sister between them was mentally retarded. [Right after my sister Grace was born, my mother's seventh child, my mother collapsed from exhaustion and her doctor placed her on heavy sedation so she would be forced to rest. Unfortunately, it was of no significance to the country doctor that my mother was breast feeding her baby. My mother said later that she was so grateful at the time that *Kamisama* (God) was good to her for giving her a baby who was very quiet and slept most of the time. When Grace was two years old, our parents became concerned that she appeared not to be making normal progress and made arrangements for her to be medically checked. I was six years old at that time and vividly remember being upset because some man in a white uniform took our baby away. The doctor was a young intern, Eddie Hashimoto, who was the son of one of my mother's friends. He took Grace to a clinic at the University of Utah for observation. The conclusion was that Grace had been affected by the drugs that my mother was taking when she nursed her.]*

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

My very youngest sister, Mimi, was in high school and graduated from Reno High School.

IRITANI: That sister who was retarded, was she extremely, severely retarded?

OTANI: No. But not educable. It would have been so different today with the many opportunities for disadvantaged individuals. She definitely was not severely retarded. Most people never knew she was retarded.

IRITANI: Are your siblings still living now?

OTANI: Two have died, [actually three counting the brother who died at six months, and my sisters Grace and Bessie. Grace was 62 years old and Bessie was almost 67.]* There are six of us living now.

IRITANI: And scattered?

OTANI: No. Everybody's in Reno, except myself. I'm the only one who has strayed away.

IRITANI: And yet you are close. And then how did your father and mother recover from their situation? They got into this pigeon hole little shack, little house, and he worked. Did your mother ever work outside as well?

OTANI: She never worked outside. But she worked along with my father for a short while in the vegetables, bunching onions.

IRITANI: As far as the community goes, then, the farmers' crops were acceptable, there was no. . .

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

OTANI: Yes, yes.

IRITANI: You grew food for everybody.

OTANI: Evidently.

IRITANI: Were there other situations that you could see that the prejudice against the Japanese raised its head? In any other situations?

OTANI: No, I really wasn't aware of it because we were so closely associated with the Japanese in the community. We did everything together. Like you said you did in camp? We had parties, always with the Japanese. There were several families that came out from camp.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

IRITANI: [Do you] have any other incidences of that time that you remember, you recall?

OTANI: [To avoid the evacuation, the Imagire family--parents and two sons--moved to Reno on their own. They became our family's closest friends, especially Mrs. Imagire and my mother.]*

IRITANI: They moved from where?

OTANI: From Berkeley.

IRITANI: Oh, I see. And they made their home in Reno?

OTANI: In Reno. They stayed there. So like I said, the only people we hobnobbed with, and did everything with, were all Japanese. We

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

bowled together. We had parties together. We sort of clung to each other.

IRITANI: And each of these people had their own jobs there as well.

OTANI: The majority worked for Levi Zentner which was a food distributor. I think it was vegetables mostly.

IRITANI: In the area.

OTANI: In the area. The majority of them worked for the same company. Levi Zentner. I had a unique job. My sister Bessie had a unique job. But every family I could think of worked for this company.

IRITANI: And the farmers had. . . the farmers foods were supplied through this Levi Zentner, as well?

OTANI: Yes, I'm sure. This Japanese farmer friend of ours, I'm sure of, because his two sons worked for Levi Zentner.

IRITANI: So this area was. . . Reno was. . . the Japanese people were fortunate that Levi Zentner was an open employer.

OTANI: Right. I think so.

IRITANI: So, your father at that point was quite elderly wasn't he?

OTANI: Well, no.

IRITANI: Was he a young man?

OTANI: No. When I figured it out, he was just fifty six years old when he was fired by the railroad company.

IRITANI: Okay. He wasn't near retirement, either.

OTANI: But he never was retired by the railroad. He always bragged that all his life he had very respectable supervisory type of jobs. You

know, section foreman, motorman in the coal mines supervising men. He said he never did "pick & shovel" work. But, after he got fired by the railroad, it was a different story. There was a time when he worked in a laundry. He found it very demeaning. Very, very demeaning. He was so unhappy.

IRITANI: At what point was that?

OTANI: Those are the only jobs I can remember his ever having after moving to Reno. The Isseis, too, stuck together. They were always getting together [eating and drinking and singing.] You know how the Isseis enjoy singing Japanese songs. [*Shigin* and popular, as well. We Nisei all agreed that they had more fun than we did. Their food was certainly better, so we would crash their parties whenever we could.]*

IRITANI: *Naniyabushi*. [a semi-classical form of Japanese monologue singing].

OTANI: They all clung together.

IRITANI: So, your social life was around the Japanese community's life. And outside of your work, then, you weren't in the larger community very much?

OTANI: No. But, you know, my sisters all intermarried. I'm the only one who's married within my race.

IRITANI: Oh, really?

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

- OTANI: All my sisters married *hakujins* [Caucasians]. My brothers married *hakujins*. My second brother married a Japanese but divorced. They had two children. [He subsequently married a *hakujin* and fathered two more children.]
- IRITANI: It doesn't mean that it always works out, does it?
- OTANI: No, no it didn't in my brother's case, at least. Then I married a Japanese and moved to California.
- IRITANI: Right. And this is your husband's [Robert Otani] home area?
- OTANI: Yes. He was born and raised here in Loomis. [Outside of four and a half years in the military service, he was away only several years working as a chick sexor.]
- IRITANI: That was before he got married to you. He was in the service. . . well, you weren't married to him at that time either.
- OTANI: I met him after the war. One of the young men [Ted Adachi] who lived in this community, he doesn't live here now, but lives in Washington. He was a good friend of Bob's, and was also in the same army camp as my brother Roy. My brother sent Ted Adachi to visit our family in Reno on his furloughs. He brought Bob with him on one of his visits. And that's how we met.
- IRITANI: And you were already working there. It was after the war had ended. And I'll see if we could get Bob to talk to us, too. And get his story. So you were married in 194--, 1951. Okay. And you have how many children now?

OTANI: Two. My older one [Robert Kelley Otani, M.D.] was born in '54, so he'll be 44 in December. And Maureen [Leslie Otani Johnson] is two years younger than he is. And she has a son. She was divorced and is now remarried.

IRITANI: She is living in this area, too?

OTANI: In South Sacramento.

IRITANI: And your son lives?

OTANI: He's a physician. His specialty is Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and he practices in Chico. Practice is what doctors are accused of a lot nowadays, isn't it?

IRITANI: [laughter] Oh, he's up in Chico.

OTANI: Let's see, there was something I was going to tell you. What was it? Oh, oh. About my employment. I started bringing out my check stubs and things, to find out how long I worked here and there. Before Kelley was born, I worked for Aerojet General Corporation.

IRITANI: They were on 80 freeway.

OTANI: [They've either down-sized or no longer exist--I never hear or see anything about the company.] I was with them for eight months before I got pregnant with Kelley. And then I stayed home until Maureen was about four years old when I went to work for Sierra College. It was a necessity, because the farm was going downhill.

IRITANI: Your husband was farming? He went back to the family farm?

- OTANI: Right. This was all farm. Fruit trees--plums and pears. But, we got to the point where we couldn't make a living at it, and I had to go to work. Which is fine, because [otherwise I probably wouldn't have much of a retirement income.]
- IRITANI: Sierra College is. . . was that on your land?
- OTANI: No, the property was formerly owned by the Takahashi family. But, when I went to work for Sierra College, they were still in Auburn. I worked in Auburn for six months, and then I moved down here with them [across Sierra College Boulevard from the Otani house]. Very convenient for me.
- IRITANI: Of course. Right across the street. And then you retired in?
- OTANI: I retired in '83.
- IRITANI: So here you're living in a nice quiet area.
- OTANI: This area has grown so fast, Joanne. You know, this used to be, not that long ago, out in the "boonies." Bob's dad [Tomehachi Otani] put in the Sierra College Road. It's still in the same line where his father built the road to take his fruit to Loomis. There was nothing out here. When Sierra College moved down here, do you know what they called themselves? Sahara College.
- IRITANI: Because it was out in the desert? [laughter]
- OTANI: See all these shops and the shopping center?
- IRITANI: And it's all built up. This whole area has built up.
- OTANI: Too fast.
- IRITANI: Well, you know, we haven't touched on your parents' childhood.

OTANI: Oh, we didn't, did we?

IRITANI: That's okay. Could you go back to telling us about your folks, and what you recall that they told you about their early experiences?

OTANI: For years, my father was reluctant to talk about himself and his past because he came over as a stowaway.

IRITANI: It was a "no-no"?

OTANI: A "no-no" subject. And he never told us children until he was in his seventies or eighties. He never revealed it until then.

IRITANI: And he died when?

OTANI: He was ninety seven years old when he died, and that was in 1982.

IRITANI: But anyway he was ninety seven already.

OTANI: Ninety seven years old. My mother died in 1966. My father had a very tragic childhood. His father, I'm repeating all this to you. . .

IRITANI: Oh, that's okay. But could you tell us where did he say, which Ken [Japanese prefecture] was he from?

OTANI: Wakayama Ken.

IRITANI: Wakayama.

OTANI: But he wouldn't even tell me. When Bob and I were planning to make our trip to Japan, I took a map to my Dad, and asked him to point out where his home was, and he wouldn't tell me. He said, "Don't bother. Don't bother going there." So to this day, I don't know, none of us knows, where he actually grew up, because he was so reluctant to talk about it.

IRITANI: His tragic childhood, could you relate that?

OTANI: He said his father was a fisherman. He had his own ship and a crew. He went out one day and never came back. My father was nine years old. Until then, he said the family was very comfortable. He said he remembered being surrounded by servants and leading a good life.

IRITANI: Oh.

OTANI: In Japan, when his father perished, there was no such thing as a welfare system. Have you heard that?

IRITANI: I've heard that, but it depends on the family, I'm sure.

OTANI: Anyway, his mother had four young children and no benefits.

IRITANI: At that time, certainly.

OTANI: His mother was really destitute. Very destitute. So my dad was sent to live with an uncle who promised to take care of him. But my father found out that his uncle took advantage of him and wouldn't even allow him to go to school. My father was self-taught. He said he was kept in separate quarters and made to do menial tasks. He was treated very badly by this man. My dad came to the United States when he was sixteen years old. So I'm sure for seven years of his life, he had suffered a very bad time.

IRITANI: Not a happy childhood.

OTANI: Not a happy childhood. So we know hardly anything about my father.

IRITANI: About what year did he come then? Well, it's okay. We know he was sixteen.

OTANI: [He came to the United States in 1901.]

IRITANI: Well, I think at this point. . . I think we'll just insert it later.

OTANI: My mother and her family lived in Sakai, which is in the outskirts, in the suburbs of Osaka.

IRITANI: Right.

OTANI: My mother's father owned a silk factory. She said she had a very, very comfortable life. She told us about how servants brought her lunch to school every day among other things.

IRITANI: Oh. [laughter]

OTANI: When Bob and I went to visit them, my uncle showed us where she attended college and other schools she attended. She went to a teachers' college, evidently.

IRITANI: Oh my.

OTANI: And she had a very easy life. She was twenty one years old when she came over [1914] to marry my dad.

IRITANI: Do you know the circumstances of that?

OTANI: How they met?

IRITANI: Uh huh. How. . .

OTANI: My father was twenty nine years old when he got married. My mother was twenty one. [Not all young Japanese men came to the United States with the intention of staying. Some came] just as a lark to see what life was like here. One of my father's friends fit into this category, and when he was ready to return to Japan, he told my father that it was time for him to settle down so he would

make arrangements with someone for him to marry.. Evidently my father was having a good time. I think he was one of these party people, from the sound of it.

IRITANI: And he lived where? At that time.

OTANI: This is not clear. Our family doesn't know. This young man made the arrangements for my mother and father to get together. He was the *baishakunin*.

IRITANI: It was during the time of picture brides.

OTANI: So this friend went to meet my mother's family, and assured my father that my mother came from a very nice family. As far as I'm concerned she was a picture bride. But my mother always insisted that she was not a typical picture bride.

IRITANI: No, she wasn't. She was a very educated person, too.

OTANI: Yes, as I said, my uncle showed me where she went to college.

IRITANI: Because, that's not typical of the Issei women that came. They had either finished sixth grade or didn't, a lot of the women who came. They were not educated to the college level.

OTANI: My mother often talked about her trip over here. She said she was so carefree--it was a big lark to her.

IRITANI: Yes. A new adventure.

OTANI: It was a big adventure. She said she was happy. Carefree. Life was pretty good then because my father was able to earn a good living but then her health started going downhill. She had too many kids--too many babies. She told us that she used to envy her

OTANI: *hakujin* [Caucasian] friends, wondering how they avoided having babies. [laughter] And she said. . . she actually told us this. She said she wanted to ask them, but her English was inadequate. She wanted to know how to avoid having so many babies. [laughter] Her health was very poor. I feel that it may have been because of a genetic defect. [Two of her sisters died of heart failure at young ages--one during childbirth. As long as I can remember, my mother was afflicted with a bad heart. One of the things I made it a point to ask my uncle when Bob and I visited Japan was how they could have allowed my mother to come to America? He said his family understood that it was to be for three years only. My uncle sent my mother money to return to Japan, but with the arrival of one baby after another, she never made it. Never saw her family again.]*

IRITANI: Then she was how old when she died?

OTANI: She was 72.

IRITANI: Which is still a very long life!

OTANI: That was very good for somebody who had suffered as much ill health as far back as I can remember. She always seemed to be in and out of bed.

IRITANI: Well, having so many daughters helped her, too.

OTANI: Oh, I'm sure. Yes, we all took care of her. I remember calling the doctor in the middle of the night.

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

IRITANI: Oh, my. So your mother had a very easy childhood and your father had a difficult one. So do you know anything more about your father's. . . the fact that he was a stowaway? Did he attempt to get. . . did he get his citizenship?

OTANI: Yes, he did. He was the very first one to get his citizenship papers in Reno. And when he got his, then he. . .

IRITANI: Spread the word?

OTANI: He got all the other Issei people together and coached them.

IRITANI: Classes. So he was self-taught.

OTANI: Yeah, he was a ring leader. There was a picture of him in the Reno newspapers because he was the very first one to get his citizenship.

IRITANI: Right.

OTANI: But, it [must have been a terrible worry for him, because of the circumstances under which he arrived in the United States. We kids were totally unaware.]*

IRITANI: Kind of hanging over him, wasn't it?

OTANI: I'm sure, I'm sure.

IRITANI: Do you know if he stowed away on a boat that landed in San Francisco?

OTANI: Seattle.

IRITANI: Seattle. I'd read about some of the men who jumped ship in Seattle who were working on the ship and the ship's company

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

OTANI: tried so hard to keep them because they had to go back to Japan with that ship. And the guys had jumped ship.

OTANI: Oh-h-h.

IRITANI: So, but you don't know anything more about that, huh?

OTANI: No, gosh.

IRITANI: He didn't go into detail on that?

OTANI: That's what so sad, you know. I wish so much that he told us some more. He was a scholarly type of person. He was always studying. Always studying. Always had a dictionary at hand. Always writing poems. The people in this community knew him before they ever met him because they said they recognized the poems that he sent to the Japanese newspapers in San Francisco.

IRITANI: Oh, really? Do you still have those?

OTANI: No.

IRITANI: Nobody has those?

OTANI: I don't know if, well, all the Isseis are gone now. I don't think you see the worth of things like that, you know, when you're young.

IRITANI: No, but there's value in all that [inaudible] pay more attention.

OTANI: And he was always playing the *shakuhachi*. He loved music. I have some of his records he recorded. And he loved to sing. He loved to sing not only *shigin*, but popular songs. And he was determined to learn the "Tennessee Waltz." [laughter] He loved the "Tennessee Waltz." [He was blessed with a good voice. He was a very scholarly person, and had an excellent knowledge and

affinity for United States history, government, and current events.]*

IRITANI: So he always took the *Nichi Bei* [Japanese language paper published in San Francisco] or one of the other papers, and so he kept in contact with the larger Japanese community.

OTANI: Evidently. And then when he got into *shigin*, [he did a lot of traveling to attend the Shigin group meetings that were so popular in California.]

IRITANI: He was already an adult.

OTANI: After we got to Reno.

IRITANI: Oh, after you got to Reno.

OTANI: After we got to Reno, somehow or other, [I don't remember, my mother and father both got involved in the Shigin groups, traveling sometimes to southern California.]

IRITANI: They did have their own group.

OTANI: [All the Issei in Reno got together as one group, meeting frequently. I remember one occasion when they hosted groups from California.]*

IRITANI: And when he got his citizenship it was he himself found out what to do? Because he didn't have a class to start with.

OTANI: No.

IRITANI: He had to find out for himself.

*Mrs. Otani added the preceding bracketed material during her review of the draft transcript.

- OTANI: I'm sure he did it on his own. Investigated it. He was that type of person.
- IRITANI: And he got the other community members to get theirs. Oh, very good.
- OTANI: And he coached them. I think that's the word. He coached them and helped them to get theirs.
- IRITANI: Very good.
- OTANI: My mother got hers, too.
- IRITANI: It wasn't easy for them.
- OTANI: But you know, I think my dad was more American than he was Japanese. You know, having come over at such a young age.
- IRITANI: He was sixteen.
- OTANI: Yeah. He came over so young. So I remember, just to get him riled up, my brothers would engage him in arguments about politics. He was very knowledgeable about history and current events, government issues. I remember when I was in high school I wanted to know the name of the cabinet members, and he could tell me.
- IRITANI: [laughter] Do you remember if he went to school when he first came here?
- OTANI: No, he didn't. He was self-taught.
- IRITANI: Really self-taught. Isn't that something?
- OTANI: And all of our friends, our Japanese friends, as well as hakujin friends would always be amazed that he spoke English so well for

an Issei. But having come over so young, I guess it was easier for him.

IRITANI: Easier to. . . and was his accent pretty. . .

OTANI: Oh, he had an accent.

IRITANI: Still.

OTANI; Isn't that something?

I have a cousin. . . this has nothing to do with this interview, I just have to tell you about it.

IRITANI: It's okay.

OTANI: We have a cousin that. . . he's my uncle's son. My uncle, the only surviving sibling on my mother's side. . .

IRITANI: He's still in Japan?

OTANI: When Bob and I went to Japan, it was the first time we met with him and he took us all around. After we came home, we got word that he died from a heart attack. I was heart broken. I thought we had caused him to die, you know. caused his heart failure. So I remember telephoning and crying and telling my aunt that it was all our fault. And she said, "No, no, no. He had been ill before we arrived."

Anyway, his son, my cousin, was enchanted from the time he was a little tot with all of us in America, that he was determined to learn the English language, and he speaks it better than I do. He has a very high mucky-muck job. He came over and spent. . . it's not clear to me what he does. As I understand it, he negotiates

contracts for some big company. He came to San Jose, brought his wife and children, and lived there for five years, and now he's in London, for five years. But you don't notice a trace of an accent with him.

IRITANI: The accent? Well good for him.

OTANI: But apparently they start when they are first graders to learn English. It makes a difference. But he was also very determined. He said he was. He told us he was determined.

IRITANI: To lose that accent?

OTANI: No, to learn the English language. And it was apparently to his benefit because he is then able to get these big, high caliber jobs.

IRITANI: Jobs, that's right.

OTANI: Anyway that has nothing to do with. . .

IRITANI: But the fact that your father could not lose his accent. . .

OTANI: No, no.

IRITANI: It's very typical of the Isseis. Although they have the skills otherwise, but that tongue does not. . .

OTANI: Right, right.

IRITANI; So now here you are, all retired. What organizations are you involved in now?

OTANI; I'm getting more and more involved in church work.

IRITANI: Oh, you are? At the Loomis First [United] Methodist Church?

OTANI: The First Methodist Church, yes.

IRITANI: I've been there.

- OTANI: Yeah, that's where I saw you when you came with Mary Tsukamoto.
- IRITANI: Right. We brought the exhibit.
- OTANI: I was so impressed.
- IRITANI: I also spoke to the UMW [United Methodist Women]. I'm District treasurer of UMW, so I met Sarah Nitta, your treasurer. And I understand you were a president of your unit? With your local unit?
- OTANI: Well, way back.
- IRITANI: Way back.
- OTANI: Way back, right. When the kids were babies, yet.
- IRITANI: Oh, I see. When it was still the WSCS [Women's Society of Christian Service prior to being renamed United Methodist Women].
- OTANI: Right. Also I have belonged to the JACL [Japanese American Citizens League] for fifty years. When I came to Loomis, I was made secretary, recording secretary.
- IRITANI: The Placer County Chapter?
- OTANI: Yes. I was active in JACL in Reno, too. That's another thing we did as a Japanese group. [I was a charter member of the Reno chapter. I just received an invitation as a charter member from the Reno Chapter JACL to help celebrate their 50th Anniversary on May 9th.]
- IRITANI: When was that?

OTANI: Very shortly after the war.

IRITANI: That it was started right after the war ended?

OTANI: Yeah, somewhere in there. I was the Treasurer. So I've been in JACL for a long time. And what else do I do. [inaudible] I had been golfing three times a week. But then last December I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

IRITANI: Oh, really.

OTANI: So I had a mastectomy in December. And then. . .

IRITANI: One side, one breast?

OTANI: Yeah. So I hadn't golfed for almost a year. I went back in September and played terribly. I'd been off again for six months because of rain. I golfed last week and also this week.

IRITANI: You feel better on the course now?

OTANI: I don't like to exercise. I feel that if I keep up with my golf it forces me to at least walk. One of my friends got me to join an exercise class and I went for about a month and finally said, "This is not for me." It takes discipline.

IRITANI: I don't have that either.

OTANI: Oh, really? I'm glad to hear that. [laughter]

IRITANI: My downfall. My kids have criticized me. They said, "You want me to buy the. . ."

OTANI: My daughter bought me a machine. . .

IRITANI: And I don't use it. [laughter]

OTANI: She bought this \$700 machine, and I have never used it. She also bought me an exercycle and I've never stepped foot on it.

IRITANI: So, how is your breast cancer? What condition now? You have to go every. . .

OTANI: I don't have to do anything. I just have to go for a check up every four months. And self-examinations.

IRITANI: But so far, so good?

OTANI: So far, so good. I consider myself very lucky. They caught it early enough. You know, I have a mammogram every year. That's how they spotted it.

IRITANI: Oh, they did? Wow.

OTANI: The doctor pulled out the last three years' mammograms and he showed me where the first two were clear, and the spot appearing on the third most recent one.

IRITANI: It wasn't there.

OTANI: It wasn't there on the previous year. It was a year in December 1997 since I had the mastectomy, so the previous year 1995 didn't show anything.

IRITANI: It didn't show?

OTANI: It didn't show. And then all of a sudden in 1996 there was that spot. Devastating!

IRITANI: Very lucky. And you did have chemo, or you didn't need it?

OTANI: No, I didn't need it.

IRITANI: Because it was so small?

OTANI: Yes, but then I had a second frightening episode. I don't know why, but I got this terrible pain in my leg, and I couldn't walk. . .

Hi, Alex! [Ida's grandson entered the room].

And the doctor thought the cancer had gotten into my bones. So I had to agonize through that. He sent me for a bone scan and fortunately, it turned out to be negative.

IRITANI: Good, good.

I think maybe we ought to just close this interview. I think we've covered quite a bit.

OTANI: More than you wanted.

IRITANI: No, everything that you said was just fine. Really. So we'll just close this interview, and thank you very much, Ida. It has been very enjoyable.

OTANI: It has been enjoyable meeting you and talking with you.

IRITANI: And to know that I also don't exercise.

OTANI: Exactly. Exactly, Joanne.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[End of interview]

NAMES LIST

NAME	IDENTIFICATION	SOURCE OF VERIFICATION	PAGE INTRODUCED
Sam Masaiichi Nishiguchi	Father	Ida Otani	1
Yaeno Kawaguchi Nishiguchi	Mother	"	1
Mary Nishiguchi Chadwell	Oldest sister	"	1
Roy Nishiguchi	Older brother	"	3
Ray Nishiguchi	Brother died in infancy	"	3
Art Nishiguchi	Older brother	"	3
Bessie Nishiguchi Allard	Younger sister	"	3
Grace Nishiguchi	Younger sister	"	3
Joy Nishiguchi King	Younger sister	"	3
Mimi (named Elaine) Nishiguchi Davis	Youngest sister	"	3
Mrs. Christie Thompson	Director of Public Health Nursing Nevada State Department of Health	"	7
Dr. Robert Steele	President of Westminster College	"	8
Mrs. Boyd	Hotel owner in Gerlach who refused to help her pregnant sister	"	9
Mary Date	A friend in Reno who helped to find housing for the family	"	13
Fumi Shimada	Fumi's father was also fired by the railroad company	"	13
Bob Otani	Husband of Ida	"	16
Mrs. McGinnis	Restaurant owner in Gerlach who gave Ida a job waiting on tables	"	16
Mr. Graham Dean	Publisher of Reno newspapers hired Ida to be his secretary	"	17
Mr. Linnecke	President of Reno Business College	"	17
Eddie Hashimoto	Intern at the University of Utah clinic	"	20
Imagire family	Friends in Reno	"	22

NAME	IDENTIFICATION	SOURCE OF VERIFICATION	PAGE INTRODUCED
Levi Zentner	Name of food distributor company	"	23
Ted Adachi	Brother's friend who brought Bob Otani to Reno	"	25
Robert Kelley Otani, M.D.	Son of Ida and Bob Otani	"	26
Maureen Leslie Otani Johnson	Daughter of Ida and Bob Otani	"	26
Tomehachi Otani	Bob's father	"	27
Sawaye Kono Otani	Bob's mother	"	27
Alex Otani	Grandson	"	42

NICHI BEI TIMES NEW YEAR'S SUPPLEMENT

Thursday, January 1, 1998

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

With the Historic Redress Program Coming to a Close, those Yet Denied Reparations Still Seek Justice.



HAPPIER TIMES — Japanese American families pose at the Dumphy, Nevada Western Pacific Railroad yard, circa 1928. Pictured are members of the Inouye, Torakawa, Morimoto, Itakura, Otsuki, Seno and Ogasawara families. (from the collection of Kay Ogasawara/Courtesy of Mos Hatano)

A Little-Known Case for Reparations

Fired from their Jobs During WWII, Railroad and Mine Workers Seek Redress

By KENJI G. TAGUMA
Nichi Bei Times

Fumiko Ishii Shimada may have been only two-and-a-half years old at the time, but her wartime experience in Sparks, Nev. was so harrowing that it is forever burned into the fabric of her life.

That is when her father, like many other fellow Japanese American railroad workers, were fired from their jobs and faced uncertainty and hardships in the days following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. More than 50 years later, families of these railroad workers, along with mine workers also fired, are in an 11th-hour drive for redress and reparations from the U.S. government.

Central to their argument is the assumption that the U.S. government had ordered the firings. Although the sparse documentation available provides

shadows of ambiguity, a recently discovered master's thesis — alluding to some government involvement — offers a glimmer of hope for those who have already been denied redress.

Shimada, a 58-year-old schoolteacher at Cal Middle School in Sacramento, has perhaps one of the strongest cases for redress. Her father, Kametaro Ishii, was a machinist with Southern Pacific Railroad at the time World War II broke out, and had devoted some 22 years to the company.

He and other railroad workers were fired from their jobs around Feb. 18, 1942, their immigrant dreams shattered by a war they didn't understand. The effects of the firings shot through the Ishii family.

"(Dad) was devastated and distraught as he had to explain to his wife and five young mi-

nor children that our livelihood had just been stripped from our lives," said Shimada. "I guess his Japanese pride was affected."

Speaking of the firings revived painful memories for Shimada.

"He wanted to commit suicide," she remembered. "He wanted to kill me, and then kill himself so there would be two less mouths to feed."

"I went outside and hid, because I didn't want him to find me. I was scared to death of my

(Continued on Page 3)

FROM PAGE ONE: Railroad Workers

dad."

On Dec. 7, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Proclamation 2526, which, according to Shimada, stated that no "alien enemy" found to constitute a danger to the public peace and safety of the United States should be found within a designated area surrounding railroad terminals, depots or yard of the immediate vicinity. Apparently the proclamation, which caused much confusion, was lifted later. The ambiguity of the proclamation, however, was later replaced by the clear-cut firings.

Railroad Legacy

Although not widely known, Japanese Americans have a rich legacy in the history of railroads in America, says Mas Hatano, a volunteer docent at the California State Railroad Museum. Hatano, a retired engineer for CalTrans, is presently collecting historical information for a proposed exhibit on Japanese Americans in the railroad industry.

At the turn of the century, there were about 30 Japanese labor contractors, who were given a finder's fee by American railroad companies to locate laborers.

"They exploited the work-

ers," Hatano said of the contractors.

"Initially they were all young people," said Hatano of the workers, who came as sojourners. "They were supposed to work three years (and then leave)."

The pay for railroad laborers was about \$1 a day, which was six times the amount they could make in Japan. The influx of Japanese on the railroads — there were 13,000 of them working in the industry by 1906 — came as the Chinese were leaving the industry.

"By 1900, the Chinese workers either went back to China, were dying off, or were too old," said Hatano, who noted that the Japanese were the largest ethnic group employed as laborers on Northwest railroads at the time.

Due to the 1908 Gentlemen's Agreement, whereby Japan agreed not to issue any more passports to laborers, the number of Japanese in the industry began to decline sharply. The number employed on railroads sharply declined to 4,500 by 1916, even though the peak in the golden age of railroading had not yet occurred," said Hatano.

(Continued on Page 7)

FROM PAGE THREE: Japanese American Railroad Workers Seek Redress

Wartime Firings

While it is well documented that the Japanese were indeed fired as a result of Pearl Harbor, the point of contention is who ordered the firings.

Recent research by historians, as well as testimony from railroad families, point the finger at the U.S. government.

"I think the federal authorities had some hand in firing them," said historian Andrew Russell, who wrote his master's thesis on Japanese Americans in wartime Nevada. He wrote the groundbreaking thesis last year while at University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

The thesis has opened a Pandora's Box, as historians and railroad workers alike refer to it to amplify the call for redress.

The "Smoking Gun"

Shimada said that her father's job was fought for by his boss — a state assemblyman — who said he approached the governor of Nevada for leniency.

"He personally made an appeal to the governor of Nevada to please spare this man's job since he had a wife and five young children to support," said Shimada. "The governor told him it was out of his hands since it was a presidential order."

Written evidence of this conversation would, perhaps, guarantee redress. However, like in most railroad cases, such evidence has been elusive.

According to historian Michi Weglyn, Russell's thesis contains "remarkable materials that clearly expose FBI involvement in mass layoffs of Japanese workers" — hence, the "smoking gun" that advocates of the fired railroad and mine workers were looking for.

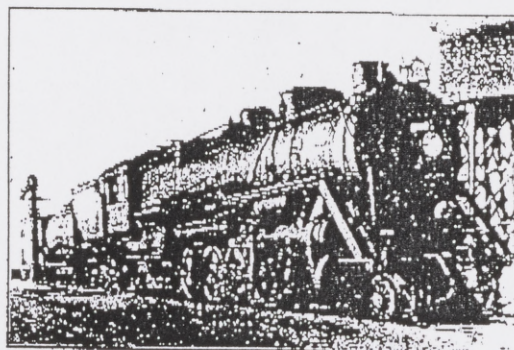
The thesis was discovered by Fumiko Shimada in her research endeavors in Nevada, and has since been sent to the Office of Redress Administration in Washington, D.C. along with other documents supporting her claim.

Minutes from a Dec. 8, 1941 meeting of the White Pine County Council shows that workers in Ruth, Nev., a company town owned by Nevada Consolidated Copper Corporation, had introduced a resolution demanding the immediate confinement of Japanese workers. The minutes state that guards "will be posted and an attempt will be made to hold the Japanese together until further notice... the FBI did not want wholesale discharges or dismissal since the federal agency didn't want Japs to spread."

A Dec. 11, 1941 letter written by H.M. Peterson (an official of the Nevada Northern Railroad) stated: "Mr. W. Howard Gray, (the attorney for Nevada Consolidated) and representative [of the] FBI gave me [the] following instructions: All Japanese, German and Italian aliens in our service must receive no pay after today in any form until we are so advised by Mr. Gray."

Other documents uncovered by Russell depict the interplay between federal and local officials, as well as the railroad company heads.

Weglyn suggests that Union Pacific President Jeffers seemingly requested and got the "green light" to lay off Japanese workers from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover on Feb. 11, 1942. A letter from Jeffers to Com-



RAILROAD HERITAGE — Railroad workers, such as Joe Kusumoto (above, Dec. 10, 1924), were part of a relatively unknown legacy of Japanese Americans who made contributions on the railways. Although not fired from the railroad during World War II, Kusumoto was demoted. (from the collection of Heisei Kikumoto/courtesy of Mas Hatano)

manding General, Seventh Corps Area on that day stated: "I talked with Mr. Hoover of the FBI and subsequently talked with Attorney General Biddle and... I was given to understand that they saw no objection."

On Feb. 13, the Union Pacific fired all of its Japanese workers, and by Feb. 18 other railroad companies did so as well, Weglyn notes.

According to Russell, during the week of Feb. 18, 1942, "most of the Nevada newspapers reported the Japanese railroaders were all fired, and that it looked like a government firing."

Does Russell's research provide the "smoking gun"? Officials at the Office of Redress Administration, who distribute redress payments, don't seem to think so.

"It was not compelling enough," said DeDe Greene, administrator for redress.

"We look at the totality of evidence," said Joanne Chiedi, deputy administrator for redress. "Unfortunately, I think the 'smoking gun' might be in the employer's private files. We can't get access to them."

According to Chiedi, ORA has conducted "extensive research" into the railroad and mine workers' cases.

"We want to pay them," she said. "The problem we have is we have letters from the presidents of the railroad companies that said it was their 'own actions.' You can't ignore this."

Currently, Chiedi said, the ORA is trying to locate former FBI agents who were alive during World War II to seek their testimony.

Russell, although downplaying the significance of his research — which was limited to certain communities in Nevada — thinks that it does have "major relevance" to the overall picture of government involvement. Now working on the same topic for his doctorate dissertation at Arizona State University, he is sure that there are other company records that haven't been tapped yet which would emphasize such involvement in the firings.

"I think there's probably more than a 50/50 chance (the government ordered the firings)," said Russell.

Personal Stories

Shimada vividly remembers FBI agents searching her house in Sparks, Nev., coming up empty-handed. Her family was fortunate in that they owned their own property, and they were fairly self-sufficient. Shimada's mother sold chick-

ens and other produce, and her father, a hunter, ate what he could catch.

"We had to stick it out," she recalls.

Her family was restricted, however, to a five-mile radius and an 8 p.m. curfew.

"We definitely felt like an enemy," Shimada said. "I feel we would have been better off in (internment) camp."

Immediately after the war ended, Shimada's father was rehired by the railroad.

Ida Nishiguchi Otani, who was 19 at the time of World War II, remembers that testing period of time. Her father, Sam Masaichi Nishiguchi, was a section foreman with Western Pacific Railroad in Gerlach, Nev. A 15-year employee with the company, he was abruptly fired in February of 1942, another casualty of war.

"The family was given 24 hours to move off the railroad property," said Otani, who at the time was attending college in Salt Lake City.

Her family was living in railroad housing, and they were subsequently restricted to outside of a two-mile radius, she said.

Upon finding out of the family's plight, friends gave them a trailer that they set up in the middle of the desert.

"It was hardest on my dad, he was in a state of shock," said Otani. "He was very humiliated. Here he was, the head of the family, and he was no longer able to provide for the family."

According to Otani, two agents came and watched over the family as they were moving out. Her sister testified that one was an FBI agent.

Other stories of railroad and mine workers echo the hardships endured following the firings. At the encouragement of Michi Weglyn, these innocent victims began to flood Japanese American vernaculars over the past year, shedding light on this little-known yet important aspect of World War II.

Move for Redress

Shimada sits at her dining room table in Sacramento, amidst piles of research materials she has collected in her five-year quest for redress. The mountains of newspaper articles, correspondence and other materials are the result of numerous trips to the University of Nevada-Reno, California State University, Sacramento, and various historical societies in Nevada.

"We've taken at least 15 trips to Nevada," says her husband, Sam, who estimates the family

has spent at least \$2000 trying to build up her case for redress. Deeply skeptical of the government's response, Fumiko Shimada is becoming increasingly burdened by the weight of the efforts she has taken.

"I'm burning out, I just want an apology. Forget the \$20,000," Shimada said. "I love this country, but I really question the integrity of the government."

She also has bitterness towards the ORA. "I don't think they're following the intent of the Civil Liberties Act," she declared. "It's almost like a personal vendetta."

Shimada estimates that there are potentially some 700 Japanese Americans who may be eligible for redress, if the ORA decides to grant it. She bases her estimation on the large families indicative of the times.

"We all laugh about the \$20,000," adds Otani, 75, who lives in Rocklin, Calif. "But it's important for us that our fathers get some apology from the government."

According to Joanne Chiedi, the deputy administrator for redress at the ORA, the focus of potential redress payments, if any, would most likely be for the 14 former railroad employees still alive. Some 20 spouses and 150 children of railroad workers have applied, and were denied redress.

"As it looks now, it looks like the railroad workers themselves would be eligible if we find the 'smoking gun,'" said Chiedi.

That revelation has irked families and community advocates alike.

"It's unfair to not acknowledge the suffering the families endured," said Kay Ochi, vice president of the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations in Los Angeles. The group, which was instrumental in seeing the original redress bill passed, has been monitoring the situation.

ORA did recently grant redress to a handful of former railroad workers, however.

"We found them eligible because they were under house arrest," said Chiedi.

Chiedi assures that until the program is officially closed, ORA will continue to work on cases.

"People need to realize that we don't make the laws, we are only enforcing them," said Chiedi, who says she's been yelled at during meetings with the community.

Community Support

The families of the former railroad workers have been getting some support from the community.

Last July, Patty Wada, the Northern California-Western Nevada-Pacific district director of the Japanese American Citizens League, called the first meeting of such families at the JACL's San Francisco headquarters. There, they were able to network and share their painful experiences.

Hope may soon become reality, however, as the Los Angeles chapter of the NCCRR is currently seeking pro bono attorneys who may be interested in pursuing a lawsuit on behalf of the families. According to Kay Ochi, some have expressed "strong interest" in taking on the case.

The NCCRR has been consulting with the Japanese American Bar Association's Pro Bono Committee in Los Angeles.

Ochi said that the NCCRR is also planning a trip to Washington, D.C. in January or February to ask that the ORA implement the "benefit of the doubt" clause, which can grant redress if there is enough evidence to show the probability of the occurrence.

"Time is our greatest enemy at this point," said Ochi.

For the families who suffered, ultimate victory may rest in a simple, straightforward apology.

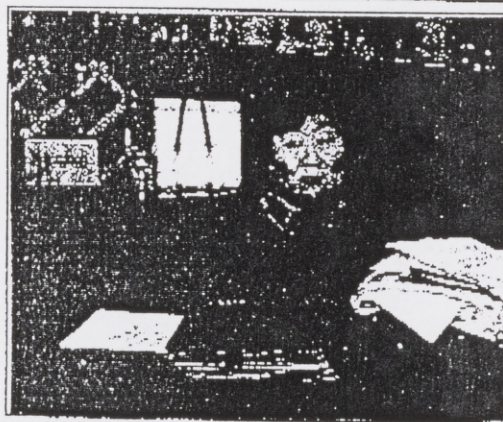
"The only thing that makes me mad is that I know the government ordered the firings," declared Shimada, who sent "two whole binders" to the ORA in August to support her claim. "I just want the federal government to admit they did it, for my dad."

The National Coalition for Redress and Reparations is currently seeking pro bono attorneys to assist in a possible lawsuit on behalf of railroad and mine workers fired during World War II. For more information, contact (213) 880-3454.

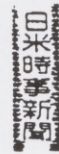
Redress Update

(as of December 1997)

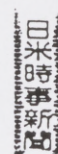
Paid: \$2,250
Re-evaluation in process: 1,870
Railroad workers: 183 ruled ineligible (14 employees, 149 children, 20 spouses)
Money left for: 966 cases
Unknown historical records: 2,200



NEW REDRESS MOVEMENT — From her living room, Fumiko Shimada has launched a movement to restore the dignity of Japanese American railroad workers fired during World War II. (photo by Kenji Taguma/Richi Bei Times)



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Tuesday, March 3, 1998

Fired Railroad, Mine Workers and Families to Get Redress

By KENJI G. TAGUMA

Nichi Bei Times

LOS ANGELES — In a surprise announcement that climaxed years of bitter struggle, the Department of Justice announced Feb. 27 that Japanese American railroad and mine workers — fired during World War II at government urging — will be eligible for redress and reparations under the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The historic announcement, made at a small community meeting in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo, also paves the way for family members of the fired workers to receive compensation.

The announcement follows a recent lobbying trip to Washington, D.C., in which family members of fired railroad workers and civil rights advocates met with Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Bill Lann Lee. It was Lee who made the announcement to a group of less than a dozen people, including members of the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations, Japanese American Citizens League, Japanese American Bar Association and a railroad family member.

"We were exuberant," said Kay Ochi, vice president of the Los Angeles chapter of the NCRP. "This was something we've been working on for years. All of it came together today."

The struggle that took years of letter-writings, rejected redress applications, and broken morale was mended in a brief, straightforward proclamation by the soft-spoken Lee.

"It was so simple ... we expected a great long speech," said Fumie Shimada, the daughter of a fired Southern Pacific Railroad worker. "In fact, my husband said 'Is that all?'"

"What we fought for for six years, they decided in two weeks," said Shimada, referring to the prior meeting with Lee and other Justice Department officials. Shimada, perhaps the most vocal railroad redress advocate, drove to the meeting from her home in Sacramento with her husband Sam.

"I am pleased that the federal government could come through for these individuals who suffered these hardships," said Lee. "I hope that this will finally end a tragic period in American history for these workers and their families."

The announcement was a dramatic reversal from the Justice Department's previous denials of the railroad and mine workers' claims. The Justice Department had previously contended that the rail-

road and mine workers and their families were ineligible for redress because their terminations resulted from the actions of private employers and local officials, and not from U.S. government action.

The Civil Liberties Act only provides redress for those who suffered losses attributable to government action.

Fired During WWII

The Justice Department's Office of Redress Administration, which was developed to implement the redress program, had determined that at least 15 workers who applied for redress were fired in February of 1942 because of an "unjustified perception" that they posed a security risk "solely because of their Japanese ancestry."

The ORA also stated that the federal government played a role in the firings by various companies — a point that had been vehemently argued by historians, community activists and railroad and mine families alike. The firings led to hard times for the defected Japanese Americans.

"It was a very traumatic time," said Lucille Honda of Santa Barbara, whose father was fired from Union Pacific. "We had it rougher than people who went to camp."

According to Honda, her father's assets were frozen, and because they were kicked out of their railroad company-provided housing, they had no roof over their heads and no food to eat.

As a result of their "constructive relocation," family members of a dismissed employee are also eligible under the law for redress.

"Generally, the nature of the work in the railroad and mining industries required that these workers, and their families, move to, and reside in, locations solely dictated by their employers' needs," explained the ORA in a press statement. "As a result, when the railroad or mine worker was terminated, job prospects, in what often was a company town, were nonexistent, and the family was forced to relocate elsewhere to survive."

According to the ORA, at least 15 former employees and 155 family members may be eligible for redress, although the actual number is likely to be much higher.

Reaction

As the meeting with Lee came to a close, and redress

advocates began to celebrate at a Little Tokyo restaurant, news of the announcement spread throughout the nation.

"That's great," said historian/activist Michi Weglyn in New York. "This is a dream come true."

"I'm glad that the government did the right thing," said Phoenix-based Andrew Russell, who is writing his dissertation on the Japanese American rail and mine workers.

"I feel like a big load has been lifted from my shoulders," said Ida Otani of Rocklin, Calif., whose father was fired by the Western Pacific railroad.

"It was pleasant disbelief," said Al Muratsuchi, regional governor of the JACL's Pacific Southwest District office, who was at the meeting with Lee. "We were concerned that he would give it to the workers and not the family members ... we didn't expect to get the whole bag."

"I was ecstatic," said Patty Wada, regional director for the JACL's Northern California-Western Nevada-Pacific District in San Francisco, who organized the first mass meeting of railroad and mining families last summer.

"We regret that my father was unable to enjoy this triumph," said Otani. "We feel that he's finally been vindicated."

A Community Effort

The success of the railroad/mining redress effort was due to the work of many individuals and groups, dedicated to seeing justice prevail.

"This is truly a collective victory for all those who pursued justice with dogged determination," said Muratsuchi. "This victory was earned by the railroad and mine workers and their families who never gave up, along with historians Michi Weglyn and Andrew Russell, dedicated NCRP activists in Los Angeles, and JACL staff and members throughout the country, particularly Northern California Director Patty Wada."

"I'm grateful that my work played a role," said a modest Russell, whose research on the Japanese American railroad and mine families in Nevada was key in the investigation. "I was at the right place at the right time."

According to Russell, some documents he recently received through the Freedom of Information Act — showing FBI involvement in some Nevada firings — would have "compounded the evidence" in support of the fired workers.

"It kind of confirmed what my other research said," stated Russell. "There's no doubt that the FBI had a hand in it."

"If it weren't for the NCRP and JACL, we wouldn't have gotten it. They wouldn't listen

to us individually," admits Shimada, who credited the organizations' political clout. Andrew Russell's paper was the final push.

Shimada also praised Weglyn for "keeping us on task. She was the inspiration that we needed to keep us going."

Weglyn encouraged the families of the fired workers to write letters to the government and to the Japanese American newspapers, and did much research on the issue herself.

Ochi credited Lee, whom she referred to as a "sensitive and courageous person," for making the decision. Wada agreed.

"You have to give credit to Bill Lann Lee for taking another look at it," said Wada.

"The Japanese American community should applaud Mr. Lee for recognizing the injustice facing the railroad and mine workers and their families, and for taking immediate action to resolve this matter," declared Muratsuchi.

Victory for All

The announcement was so stunning that Otani still has reservations as to whether the dream will come true.

"To tell you the truth, it's been such an emotional roller coaster that I just can't grasp the reality of it," she told the Nichi Bei Times.

Both Honda and Shimada felt some guidance from their fathers, who are long deceased but in whose memories they fought the battle for redress.

"I think my father was guiding me all the way," said Shimada.

According to Shimada, whether the Department of Justice decided to grant them redress or not, she would have gone down fighting "all the way to the Supreme Court."

Armed with piles of research, years of anger and hardened determination, she may have well gotten there.

"The more they refused me, the harder I fought," she declared.

Procedures

In the next few weeks, the ORA will be contacting individuals affected by the announcement to request any additional information necessary to finalize their cases. If the proper documentation is submitted on a timely basis, the ORA expects to pay these individuals over the next two to four months.

Those seeking redress are urged by the ORA to file claims by April 10, 1998 to have their cases fully resolved. The redress program is scheduled to sunset on Aug. 10.

To contact the ORA with information on potential claimants, call 1-888-219-6900; write the ORA at P.O. Box 66260, Washington, D.C. 20035-6260; or visit the Web site at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ora/main.html>.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thanks for Pushing for Railroad Redress

Dear Editor:

I want to say "thank you" to everyone who brought the railroad/mining workers' appeal for redress to fruition. With some of you I have had the privilege of personal contact — some I haven't — but to all I extend my deepest gratitude not only from myself but on behalf of my family. We are so grateful that our father's status as a proud and loyal American has finally been restored.

When I felt that I had reached the end of my resources and energy and all I had left was prayer, you all undauntedly and courageously pushed forward on our behalf, regardless of personal gain, in the name of justice.

Fumie Shimada;
Patty Wada, JACL (Japanese American Citizens League) regional director;
Kay Ochi, NCR (National

Coalition for Redress and Reparations);

Rallying support from everyday folks of church and community;

Loomis Town Council;
Andy Russell, for his research work;

Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee;

News reporters — never will I underestimate the power of the media;

Above all, Michi Weglyn, who kept sending me mountains of material, leads to pursue, many, many phone calls, and who was the catalyst in my involvement.

Throughout this ordeal you pushed and pulled and encouraged and treated me with love and with respect.

I was wondering, Michi — are you an angel?

Sincerely,
Ida Otani
Rocklin, Calif.

Historian Lauds JA Press Role in Redress

Dear Editor:

I wish to give sincere thanks for the invaluable help extended by Japanese American vernaculars — to editors, reporters and others — in playing an important role in the railroad and mine workers finally being granted the right to redress. You enabled their cries to be heard by decision makers in the Justice Department. They could no longer be easily dismissed and ignored by the powerful.

It surely is a "thank you" long overdue, when one considers the incredible deadlines all have had to meet, and for all the services the vernaculars have provided throughout our more than 10-year struggle for redress.

And now the fight for redress must continue until every last

Japanese Latin American spirited to mainland concentration camps as barter baits is given an apology and redress for their awful losses and sufferings.

A number of railroad workers have told me that they have started subscribing to certain vernaculars out of gratitude, and that is how it should be. At a time when subscriptions are down, we should help to keep our few vernaculars alive and healthy.

Sincerely,
Michi Nishiura Weglyn
New York, NY

Michi Nishiura Weglyn, a historian and redress activist, is the author of "Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps."